

CHAPTER 3

Multiple Perspectives, One Reality

The whole system becomes visible only when partial views are connected.

Once assumptions can be challenged, different perspectives can enter the conversation. Complex organisations generate many valid descriptions of the same situation. A profitability problem may also be a pricing problem, a process problem, a data problem, a customer problem or a governance problem.

The temptation is to decide which description is correct. Adaptive Thinking begins with a different question: what does each perspective reveal, and what does it leave out?

A perspective is not reality. It is a position from which reality is seen.

The strength and limit of every lens

Expertise helps people notice patterns that others miss. It also directs attention towards familiar categories. Finance translates reality into value, risk and return. Operations translates it into flow, capacity and reliability. Technology translates it into architecture, data and dependencies.

These lenses are useful because they simplify. They are dangerous when their simplification becomes invisible.

Every lens improves visibility in one direction and limits it in another.

Seniority does not remove this limitation. A broader role may provide more context, but no role eliminates perspective. The value of a contribution depends less on organisational rank than on what it helps the organisation notice.

The value of a perspective is not determined by hierarchy. It is determined by what it helps the organisation see.

Why more voices are not enough

Bringing more people into a room can increase information without increasing understanding. Each participant presents a functional view, the meeting becomes crowded and the leader is left to choose between competing narratives.

The problem is not the number of perspectives. It is the absence of a way to connect them.

More perspectives do not create confusion. Unconnected perspectives do.

Connection begins with relationships. How does a commercial promise affect operational capacity? How does a control affect customer effort? How does a technology dependency affect the economics of a business model? How does a local optimisation change risk elsewhere?

The system becomes visible in the relationships between perspectives.

Looking for what is missing

A useful discussion does not ask only who should attend. It asks which parts of reality are currently invisible.

The missing perspective may come from a customer, a frontline employee, a partner, a regulator or a market that does not fit the organisation's historical experience. It may also come from data that is available but excluded because it conflicts with the dominant story.

Blind spots are not created only by what we do not know. They are also created by who is not in the conversation.

This does not mean every decision requires every stakeholder. It means the organisation should deliberately identify which perspectives are essential to understand the consequences of the decision.

Connected thinking

The aim is not consensus. Different perspectives may continue to support different choices. Their contribution is to make the trade-offs visible and the logic of the decision more complete.

Shared understanding does not require identical thinking. It requires connected thinking.

Connected thinking allows people to say: “I see the situation differently, but I understand the relationship between your concern and the outcome we are trying to create.”

That is a stronger basis for action than superficial alignment. It preserves difference while making coordinated judgement possible.

The purpose is not to choose the right lens. It is to understand what each lens reveals and what it leaves out.

One reality, held collectively

No individual needs to understand every detail of a complex organisation. What matters is whether the organisation can combine distributed knowledge into a usable picture of reality.

This picture will always remain incomplete. Adaptive Thinking does not promise certainty. It improves the organisation’s ability to notice incompleteness, test interpretations and update its understanding as conditions change.

No one holds the full picture, but everyone may hold a piece of it.

When multiple perspectives can be expressed, challenged and connected, the organisation is ready to move from preparing the ground to using an adaptive process. It can define the situation more carefully because reality no longer enters the conversation as a single authoritative view, but as a connected picture that can be tested and updated.